
Putting affordances in social context

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Abstract

Although perception and action have been widely investigated on the assumption that they can be completely accounted for by focusing on single individuals, several cognitive neuroscientists, experimental and developmental psychologists and philosophers have recently argued for the need to take a social perspective on perceptual, motor and cognitive activities. Progress has been made by researchers in investigating the different levels of real-time social interactions by studying how mechanisms of sharing attention and action might subserve joint attention and action. However, little research has directly explored whether and to what extent sharing and joining attention and action could shape the perception of target objects as well as whether and to what extent object perception in social contexts, far from being a private business of single perceivers, could tell us something about the mechanisms underlying the primary ways in which we interact with others. In this talk, by taking advantage of empirical data collected in my laboratory, I will try to answer the following questions: How does our perception of objects change in a social context, at least at the basic level? Is it the case that the possibility for other individuals to act on an object modifies the way in which that object is given to us, starting from its affording features? And to what extent can such change shed light on the basic mechanisms of social engagement?

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